

The 2004-2005 Pricing Report

From the Editors of ComicBase

“When things heat up, the edges burn first”

After years of price *deflation* during the late 1990s and early 2000s, it’s a pleasure to report that the overall trend in comic values for the past few years has been decidedly positive. Granted, the market is hardly a scorcher overall—wide swaths of mainstream comics found their values moving mildly, if at all. But at the fringes of the market, some comics were absolutely on fire.

High Grade Comics and Golden Age Bargain-Hunting

The two trends which characterized this year’s market more than all others were the continuing price surges in high-value, graded comics, and the corollary spiking of previously forgotten second-tier Golden Age comics, as collectors looked for the Next Big Thing.

We continue to be dazzled by the auction prices realized on high grade comics, particularly “best known” CGC-graded copies of Golden Age titles. Six-figure prices have become almost commonplace for titles such as *Captain America Comics*, *Marvel Comics*, and other Golden Age greats. In a similar vein, it’s become almost comical how high the price of certain well-known (and relatively common) Silver and Bronze Age comics has climbed, with \$3,000+ being the going rate for “best known” copies of *Incredible Hulk #181* (1st Wolverine), and *Giant-Size X-Men #1* (1st New X-Men).

With such huge increases in the more well-known classic issues, many collectors have turned their attention to formerly forgotten titles, causing the values of series like *Wonder Comics*, *Thrilling Comics*, or *Startling Comics* to climb sharply, with some issues more than doubling in price this year.

“I hear there’s a movie coming out...”

Away from the world of high-roller comic sales, there’s also been a lot of action on comics with real or rumored movie adaptations in the works. Typically, movie frenzy starts building with the first rumors, and peaks a month or so shy of the movie’s release. *The time to sell is usually before the movie actually debuts.* This is particularly true if the movie turns out to be, well, less than a blockbuster.

To take advantage of movie-based speculation, pay close attention to *Variety*, get in before word spreads widely, get out before the movie’s premiere, and keep your expectations reasonable (i.e. be grateful that the upcoming Keanu Reeves

Hellblazer movie might allow you to shift your moribund backstock of that title at somewhat inflated prices, instead of trying to gouge customers by marking up mid-run issues to \$20 each. Remember: it's one thing to not eke out the very last dollar out of a sale, and another to miss the sale entirely by overpricing during a short-term wave.

Finally, remember to look backward in a character's history, picking up first appearances, origin stories, etc. that may have occurred years before the characters were featured in their own titles. For instance, John Constantine (*Hellblazer*) made his debut in *Saga of the Swamp Thing* #37, years before *Hellblazer* #1. Similarly, the first appearance of Ghost Rider was in *Marvel Spotlight* #5, a year before he spun out into his own title. It's those pre-series issues that hold the most potential for upward movement, and you'll do particularly well if you can find them at last year's prices.

Title News

- The trade paperback of ***30 Days of Night*** is one of the few collections that bucked the trend of an available trade paperback keeping prices on the individual issues low. #1 is now at \$25, while #2 and #3 are at \$15 each.
- After a couple of years of flat prices, Chris Ware's ***Acme Novelty Library*** had a surge of interest, doubling prices in many cases.
- Despite Steve Geppi's \$1 million bounty, the guide price for ***Action Comics*** #1 could only move up to just a third of that offered sum, going from \$300,000 last year to \$330,000 this year. A high-profile sale of a high-grade copy or two could easily move that number much closer to Geppi's offer, however. Following the trend of most other key Golden Age titles, only early issues and a few later keys of *Action* showed any movement this year, with only the first 26 issues (and Supergirl's first appearance in #252) moving up.
- Collectors looking for additional work by their favorite creators have begun to find obscure or overlooked series such as ***The Adventures of Rex the Wonder Dog***, which contains some wonderful Gil Kane art. While prices have moved up steadily in recent years, this past year saw a surge of interest.
- Archie's super-hero titles, including ***Adventures of the Fly***, have begun to trend downward this year, possibly fueled by speculation that a collection of stories, as was done with *The Shield*, is forthcoming.

- Early issues of **Amazing Spider-Man** (especially Doctor Octopus appearances) have risen slightly, but it seems that the really keen collectors may have picked up their issues when the first film was released a couple of years ago.
- With a flop of a TV series, **Birds of Prey** back issues dropped to or held at cover price, outside of the **Nightwing** appearance in #8, which is holding at \$30.
- With the approach of the final issue of **Bone**, prices on first printings of early issues of Jeff Smith's series have returned to earlier levels, with #1 topping out at \$100 once again. Later printings have stayed flat for the most part.
- **Buffy** fans appear to have all the copies of their favorite slayer's comic book that they want, now that the series has ended. A stake was driven through prices for the most part, with drops to cover price or just slightly above. No difference was noted between art and photo covers.
- A surge of patriotism this past year helped prices on early issues of **Captain America (Vol. 1)**, as well as its Golden Age predecessor **Captain America Comics**.
- The hoopla surrounding the wrap-up of Dave Sim's magnum opus with #300 earlier this year drove early issue prices for **Cerebus the Aardvark** up considerably, more than doubling the value of #2 from \$50 to \$125. This is surprising considering that all collections of Sim's series are kept in print.
- While not going completely nuts, media tie-in comics for current TV shows, such as IDW's various **CSI** mini-series, are on the rise. Trade paperback collections keep the individual issues from going completely crazy in back-issue prices.
- **Detective Comics** had results similar to those for **Action Comics**, even without a bounty offered by Steve Geppi. While the early key issues moved somewhat the same as early issues of Action, the trend continued much further down the list after Batman's first appearance in #27, with price increases noted for many early issues and key appearances.
- **Fantastic Four** continues to climb in back-issue sales, with multiple copies of most issues in the Stan Lee/Jack Kirby run having multiple copies slabbed in nearly all grades. Prices are on the rise, as collectors anticipate the upcoming film. Also, be aware that with Vol. 3 #70, Marvel reverted the series' numbering to Vol. 1 #500 and continued forward from there, a trick the company repeated with Amazing Spider-Man a few months later.

Somewhat annoying for indexers, it remains to be seen if other series will adopt the revised numbering as they hit their anniversary numbers.

- Charlton's various "**Fightin'**" series (**Army**, **Navy**, etc.) are fightin' to hold their values. The few sales found this year seem to indicate a slowing of collector interest in the various titles, but not enough to actually lower prices.
- Former collecting darling **Gen13**, with its swath of variant covers, suffered the usual fate of such ventures, with the entire group holding at just above cover price for each issue. Patience is rewarded for the collector who always wished for a copy, but wasn't willing to lay out the \$15 to \$20 per copy that the rarer variants once commanded.
- Who says all the action is in first issues? Marvel's licensed comics from the 1980s, **G.I. Joe, a Real American Hero** and **Transformers** continue to have higher prices for the final few issues of their respective runs with the trend running deeper on each series again this year.
- Interest in **Green Lantern's** first and second series got a recharge this year with prices for all issues of the Golden Age run and several early issues of the Silver Age run moving up. Hal Jordan's return later this year will more than likely continue to drive prices upward on his issues, a fact that wasn't known at the time pricing was completed.
- Absence does not make the heart grow fonder in the case of former indie darling **Hepcats**. No new issues or news from creator Martin Wagner has driven prices down to close to cover price for all issues.
- ACG's **Herbie** continued to bop its way upward. Collectors still love the adventures of the lollipop-wielding reluctant hero and prices keep coming up little by little.
- **Incredible Hulk** values this year were as mixed as the reaction to the movie, with the first issue going up, #2, #3, and #6 dropping in price, and #4 and #5 holding steady. Issues that picked up the numbering from **Tales to Astonish** remained steady in value for the most part, with **Incredible Hulk #181** (the first appearance of Wolverine) climbing to \$1,000 after a drop to \$850 last year.
- The return of **The Invaders** to the Marvel universe this year drove prices up on early issues of the 1970s retro series.

- Only a very few early issues of ***Iron Man***'s first ongoing series showed any spark of life at all. A recharge is needed for those back issues. Being one of the later ongoing series in the Marvel universe doesn't help matters either, but collectors continue to overlook this very affordable title.
- While we've nearly caught up to the time period of the first family of the future, prices for ***The Jetsons***, regardless of publisher, streaked ahead this year. (Now if they could just get us that car that folds into a briefcase...)
- The trade paperback curse hit ***JLA*** this year with prices for early issues dropping once again and later issues being subject to the "I'll wait for the trade" attitude mentioned earlier with prices holding at or very slightly above cover. The same thing happened to ***JSA***, with the exception of its first issue.
- Despite some recent collector claims, the market just isn't showing high prices for ***Journey into Mystery***. Oh, sure, there were some slight increases for early Thor appearances, but nothing spectacular. The trend followed the same curve as early appearances of other Marvel heroes, a rise for the first few issues, then a group of steady prices.
- Defying trends (and a decidedly mixed blessing of a movie), the first series of ***League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*** shot up in value, particularly issue #1 and the hardcover deluxe collection collecting the entire series. Issue #5 with its fake Marvel ad also continues to draw strong interest.
- The original Dell ***Lone Ranger*** series enjoyed only mild valuation increases this year, but the photo cover-laden ***Lone Ranger (Gold Key)*** series that followed it in the 1960s surged in price, nearly doubling last year's levels.
- Romance comics remain soft, with the odd high-profile, low-issue-numbered sale contrasting with the vast majority of the comics lacking some sort of mainstream comics tie-in (such as art by Simon and Kirby) being ignored by most collectors.
- While the bulk of the once-super-hot Valiant line is showing barely a twitch of life, the very earliest issues, particularly send-away premiums like ***Magnus, Robot Fighters*** #0 and certain Gold editions have been quietly shooting up in value, with #0 doubling last year, and doubling again this year to \$16.
- Early **Donald Duck** appearances, including giveaways such as ***March of Comics*** saw explosive growth in a series of high-profile sales; however, his non-feathered companion Mickey Mouse showed only modest gains.

Meanwhile, cowboy hero **Roy Rogers** (and for that matter virtually the rest of the title) underperformed at auction, and actually gave up some of their previous valuation.

- Esoteric Marvel super-heroes of the 1940s and early 1950s such as **Marvel Boy** have made big jumps as Golden Age collectors find themselves increasingly unable to afford the first appearances of the more mainstream super-heroes. Much of the phenomenon seems confined to the higher grades, however.
- **Marvel Comics #1** would fetch an estimated at \$185,000 in NM this year, with a VF (CGC 8.5) copy selling for \$126,500 in 2003, and the “Pay Copy” remaining the record-holder for most money ever paid for a comic book, garnering \$350,000 in 2002.
- What do **Iron Fist** fans know that we don’t? Is there a part for the martial artist slated for the 2005 Luke Cage movie? No matter what the cause, Iron Fist’s first appearance in **Marvel Premiere #15** tripled in value to \$120 in just a year, following years of slow decline.
- Movie mania may also be the reason for the reverse of the decline in **Marvel Preview #2**. This relatively scarce magazine-sized comic gave the first origin of Frank Castle, the Punisher. Fan interest seems to have been piqued by the idea of a non-Dolph-Lundgren film version, pumping up this key issue to more than double its 2003 value. With somewhat disappointing movie performance, however, don’t be surprised to see this move down again..
- Somebody obviously snitched. It used to be that you could locate the Marvel Fireside trades (**Origins of Marvel Comics**, **Son of Origins**, **Marvel’s Greatest Superhero Battles**, etc.) either at full-on collector prices through comic stores, or very cheaply through conventional bookstore searches like www.bookfinder.com. No more. The book store supply has dried up, and now these tomes go for several times their old price (**Marvel’s Greatest Superhero Battles** went from \$14 to \$50 in just one year!).
- More Marvel Movie Mayhem! Rumors of a **Werewolf by Night** picture have sent **Marvel Spotlight #2**, featuring the lycanthrope’s first appearance, into orbit. Don’t expect to lay your hands on a NM copy for less than \$60, and even then, you might want to act fast if rumors turn out to be true. (Of course, if it’s all just hype...)
- And the hits keep coming. **Marvel Spotlight #5**, featuring the first appearance of Ghost Rider is also shooting up in value driven by talk of a movie deal. Although we don’t expect the sort of Ghost

Rider/Punisher/Wolverine that gripped the early 1990s to reprise any time soon, fans who bought up the early appearances of Ghost Rider in *Marvel Spotlight* and *Ghost Rider (Vol. 1)* are surely smiling ghoulishly about now...

- **Esoteric 1970s Marvel titles *Night Nurse* and *Night Rider*** both have rebounded this year, even though an argument can certainly be made that their price levels are completely unjustified by their scarcity or historical level of fan interest. *Night Nurse* in particular was largely a media-manufactured price trend—and one which had indeed cooled markedly until recently. *Night Rider* was the subject of interest in the early 1990s almost solely because it reprinted the failed Marvel western series *Ghost Rider*—a name which was later recycled to become the mega-popular motorcycle-riding super-hero. Whatever the reasons, both convention and shop stock on these titles has largely dried up, spiking the prices on both titles for those who wish their own copies.
- All may be fair in Love and War, but with **Love and War comics**, it's apparently only Very Fine and above that are of any interest this year. High grade copies of the numerous war and romance comics that filled the comic landscape during the 1940s through the 1960s are getting attention at auction, but the vast majority of comics in these genres are basically treading water, showing anemic growth, if any at all.
- We all know by now that CGC-graded, high-condition comics are all the rage, but, as has been happening frequently in the past few years, sometimes collectors are paying way above and beyond the call of fandom in order to be able to say they have the best known copy of an otherwise unremarkable comic. One notable candidate for **Overpriced CGC Comic of the Year** is the \$700 copy of *Planet of the Apes (1st Series)* in CGC 9.8 condition. While multiple bidders were busy driving the price on this one skyward, another issue in what appeared to be NM- condition (but without the CGC seal) managed to get just three bids—rising to a princely \$16.50.
- One unexpected casualty of finally revealing Wolverine's origin in *Wolverine: The Origin* was that **Sabretooth** appearances in off-brand books like *Power Man & Iron Fist* tanked, as speculation that Sabretooth was secretly Wolvie's real father was finally put to rest. On the other hand, *Power Man* and *Iron Fist* climbed solidly out of the dollar-box, possibly on speculation tied to the upcoming Luke Cage movie.
- The 1985 ***Punisher (1st Series) mini-series*** is also seeing some action, although the movie-driven hype is—dare we say it—a bit reserved in nature. The series formerly cost about \$100 to purchase back in the early 1990s, but

- with several million Punisher books printed since then (and a goodly number of collectors taking a bath when they held their various Punisher #1s too long), most of the attention is focusing on the rarer, more obscure Punisher issues (in stark contrast to the 1992-1993 era, when anything with a skull-chested vigilante on it was hot, hot, hot!)
- Scott Bakula fans must have gotten their fix watching *Enterprise* re-runs; the Innovation **Quantum Leap** series starring the likable actor has officially lost whatever fire it had suddenly caught back in 2001.
 - Credit (or blame) the flood of manga and anime that's deluged the U.S. market in the last decade, but the sheer quantity of material has driven down the resale prices of early manga favorites like **Ranma ½**. Given the easy availability of trade paperbacks, the fact that the U.S. releases are actually reprints, and the nature of the readership, it seems to be almost impossible for a manga comic to rise significantly in the back issue market in the U.S.
 - Normally, kiddie comics like **Richie Rich** are among the most inactive movers in the price guide. This year however, several high-profile auction sales of top-grade early #s succeeded in nearly trebling the prices for the earliest editions, and gave a boost to the first several years of the line overall.
 - **Saga of the Swamp Thing #37**, featuring the first appearance of John Constantine (Hellblazer) took the expected jump from \$16 to \$40, based on speculation of the upcoming movie starring (gasp!) Keanu Reaves in the title role.
 - **Showcase** is a mixed bag this year, with most issues holding their very well-developed prices, with the exception of Showcase #8 (the second Silver Age Flash), Atom's appearances in #35–36, and the later Challengers of the Unknown appearances, which backslid a bit. Surprisingly, Lois Lane's first appearance in #9 jumped significantly. Also on the rise is Green Lantern's first Silver Age incarnation in Showcase #22., the Dr. No James Bond special in #43, and Sgt. Rock's origin in #45.
 - **Sonic the Hedgehog** shot up to \$20 for the #1, and \$15 for the #0 edition. If anyone knows who's buying these, please send us a clue. We just don't get it.
 - This year's Spawnwatch puts the legendary **Spawn #1** at \$3.50 in NM—the lowest we've seen it since its 1992 release. Of course, with an estimated 2.2 million copies printed, it's never been exactly *hard* to come by a copy, but

even we're surprised by the almost complete flattening of this news-making title.

- **Gruesome is in—vintage gruesome, that is.** Some of the more lurid comics from the 1950s are definitely getting a second look from collectors lately, driving up the prices of poorly written, but intriguingly illustrated titles like ***Startling Terror Tales***. The **L.B. Cole covers** are in great demand, and we've seen prices more than double on some of these early issues in good condition.
- ***Star Trek (1st Series)*** really took it on the chin this year, with many issues falling up to 2/3 from last year's prices. This seems to have set off a chain reaction stealing whatever lagging heat **virtually all other Star Trek** titles had. What's behind this pricing equivalent of calling "Everybody out of the pool!?" While the franchise has been waning for years, the event that kicked the legs out from under the market may have been the recent reissue collections of the early Gold Key comics, robbing those early Treks of whatever aura of mystery they may have enjoyed.
- ***Star Wars*** is also showing weakness. The initial issues are (just) holding their own, but this only helps to mask deflation along the rest of the line. Lot sales of issues #1–107 have been seen with some regularity. A freakish counterpoint to this trend was the astounding sale of the 35 cent cover variant of *Star Wars* (Marvel) #1 for \$4,050 in February. (All we can say is that the buyer must have *really* wanted it!)
- **The Variant Game** is alive and well—at least as far as the publishers are concerned, with titles like ***Street Fighter (Image)*** running seven issues with 27 known versions (and counting!). However the hype->crash cycle is shorter than ever, and most of the real money in the comic speculation market has shifted to CGC graded comics, as opposed to the publisher-created "collectible limited editions".
- After years of slowly sinking below the waves, The **Sub-Mariner** finds himself buoyed by both surging auction sales for the original 1940s series, and by the release of a revamped, modern version. Even the moribund Silver Age series has reversed its slow decline.
- Can't afford an ***Action Comics #1***? Apparently, the well-heeled collectors have been turning their attention to early issues of ***Superman (1st Series)*** – the first few dozen issues of which shot up markedly this year. The sheer weight of the series prevented the trend from carrying too far down the line, however.

- **Iron Man's** first appearance in *Tales of Suspense (1st Series) #39* also moved strongly upward this year, based on a number of high-condition auction sales. The trend does not appear to have carried too far down that particular title, however, although big money is still being paid for exceptional copies of individual issues.
- One of the most chaotic pricing situations we've ever seen is centered on Jim Balent's *Tarot: Witch of the Black Rose*, the market for which resembles nothing so much as a random feeding frenzy. Copies move anywhere from \$40 to \$3, in seemingly random fashion. Variants aren't necessarily selling for more than regular editions, nor are older versions selling for more than newer ones. What's more, we've seen numerous auction sales where a given issue will sell for just about cover, only to sell at \$20–30 the next (or previous) week. We've done our best to give a snapshot of the market at the time we went to press, but here's one that you'll want to watch very closely if you have interest in this series. We strongly advise using ComicBase's "Check recent sales of this title" command (right-click on the title name, or on a specific issue to pull up recent auction sales data).
- *Ultimate Spider-Man* continues to surge in the back-issue market, with everyone from the Jay Company and Dynamic Forces, to K.B. Toys and Payless Shoes getting into the game, releasing various limited editions. This is also a title where it's very interesting to watch circulation numbers. Issue #5 is showing some of the highest percentage growth, based on the idea that it was somehow underprinted (although this is not confirmed by the best data we've been able to find). It also may be a signal that the fan base for this title is becoming more shallow, based on the overall decline in circulation for later issues (from over 350,000 copies for #1–10, down to about 128,000 as of issue #29).
- *The Uncanny X-Men* have a reputation as "hot" title, but it's a reputation largely undeserved. Although it's a somewhat expensive title to collect, most of the big price changes for this 80s-and-beyond section of the X-Men happened years ago. That said, we note with interest the recent recovery of issue #266—the first full appearance of Gambit.
- Repeating the *Weird War Tales* phenomenon of a few years back, the first issue of *Witching Hour* shot straight up from \$50 to \$115, after years of treading water. The impetus seems to be an urge by collectors to buy up top-grade specimens of the bronze-age landmark issues--particularly in horror—before they became too expensive. So far, this trend applies mostly to original titles, not the countless reprint titles that appeared in the early 1970s when the Comics Code's restrictions were relaxed to allow the reprinting of material warehoused since the 1950s.

- **Wonderworld Comics**, a comic virtually unknown by newer collectors, quietly racked up a stunning advance in price this year based on multiple, very high-dollar auction sales. A (possibly nonexistent) NM copy should fetch at least \$25,000 today, based on the sales of slightly less-perfect copies. This is up from a guide value of \$5,000 last year—a level which frankly seemed mighty princely for a comic whose claim to immortality is based on a forced name change (from Wonder Comics) and the first appearance of forgotten super-hero The Flame.
- **X-Men (1st Series) #1** set a new high of \$8,000 this year with condition key to realizing that number. Like the modern X-Men, virtually all the price movement was in the very first issues of the run.
- Is **Valiant** back from the dead, or is it merely a muscle spasm from the corpse? Either way, there's starting to be real action again in the gold edition premiums Valiant pioneered as a way of currying retailer and fan favor. Among recent notable items: **X-O Manowar (Vol. 1) #0's** Gold logo edition is now fetching at least \$40, although sales have been noted for twice that. Last year? It was, almost literally, a giveaway again. We've seen similar action on the Gold editions of the other core Valiant titles as well.